



News

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Muncie residents urged to get rid of household mercury

Muncie schools, Mayor Canan help environmental agencies kick off “Mercury-Free Muncie Day”

Mayor Dan Canan and Muncie Community Schools officials at **11 a.m. on Friday, February 28, 2003**, will help federal, state and local environmental agencies kick-off an event to rid Muncie of mercury by delivering an estimated 25 pounds of the toxic element for proper disposal.

The schools' mercury will be the first contribution made at “Mercury-Free Muncie Day” – an event sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, the Muncie Sanitary District, and the East Central Indiana Solid Waste Management District. The event comes the day after the U.S. EPA completes cleanup of a Muncie home at 2413 Godman Avenue that was contaminated with about 8 pounds of mercury earlier this month.

While it is a naturally occurring element, mercury can be highly toxic and is especially dangerous to children. Just 3 grams – or a 25th of a teaspoon – of the material can contaminate a 60-acre lake.

All Delaware County residents are encouraged to follow Muncie Community Schools' example and bring in mercury-containing items to the Sanitary District's household hazardous waste facility at 701 Centennial Avenue on **Saturday, March 1, 2003, between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.** Those who bring in mercury thermometers can exchange them for a digital one. Mercury brought into the facility by private citizens will be accepted free-of-charge. All items should be brought to the collection in a closed, non-leaking plastic bag or plastic container.

“This is a great opportunity for schools and for everyone in Delaware County to conveniently get rid of a danger in their house,” said IDEM Commissioner Lori F. Kaplan. “We are delighted to partner with our federal and local agencies to provide this opportunity to Delaware County.”

Mayor Canan encouraged Muncie residents to take advantage of Mercury Free Muncie Day. “This is a great opportunity, and I hope we see a lot of people out tomorrow,” Mayor Canan said. “But it won't be your only chance to safely rid your homes of materials that can be harmful – our new Household Hazardous Waste Facility is open six days a week to provide for safe disposal of these materials.”

Muncie Community School officials have been working for several weeks to rid their 17 schools of mercury in order to comply with a new state law that prohibits the presence of mercury in schools beginning July 1, 2003. Muncie Central High School Principal Dick Daniel, Mike Wolter, a science teacher, and Dan Justice, the corporation's supervisor of custodial and maintenance service, will hand over their mercury at the

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District's household hazardous waste facility Friday morning. "This is a great opportunity for us because it dovetails into work we are already doing to collect mercury in anticipation of the new law," said Bill Reiter, director of the school corporation's facilities and operations. "We expect to be fully compliant well before the deadline to have mercury out of the schools."

The Muncie Sanitary District's household hazardous waste facility opened in May 2002. The state-of-the-art facility provides Delaware County residents a place where residential-generated material can be properly and safely recycled or disposed of free of charge.

Nikki Grigsby, the District's recycling and household hazardous waste coordinator, said Mercury Free Muncie Day is an opportunity to highlight what the district tries to do every day. "We are working hard to help local residents make a habit of safely disposing toxics as well as recycling," she said. "And we are happy to open our doors a little longer on the weekend to help encourage that way of thinking."

Normal hours of operation for the hazardous waste facility are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday – Friday and 8 a.m. to 12 noon on Saturdays. The household hazardous waste program is sponsored by MSD, East Central Recycling, and the East Central Indiana Solid Waste District. The facility does accept latex paint but encourages residents to dry this material out and recycle the container.

Bill Simes, EPA's on-scene coordinator for the Godman Avenue cleanup project, said the cooperation and assistance of state and local officials helped the federal agency work safely and efficiently to protect neighbors. "This Mercury Free Muncie Day is another example of dedicated state and local officials working to ensure a safe environment for your residents," he said. "Events like this one will increase the chances that we won't have another dangerous situation like the one on Godman Avenue."

Since 1998, through their Mercury Awareness Program, IDEM, Solid Waste Management Districts, and city partners have reduced the amount of mercury in all 92 counties and have collected and properly disposed of more than 8,000 mercury thermometers from Hoosier residences and businesses. IDEM is also encouraging all Indiana schools to participate in the agency's Mercury Reduction and Recycling for Schools pledge program. Those that take the mercury pledge are eligible for a 75 percent reduction in costs associated with packing, transporting and recycling mercury.

Mercury is a silver metal that can be a gas, liquid or solid. At room temperature, it behaves as a liquid, and scatters into beads when touched. In its liquid state, it evaporates easily into the air, or "volatizes." Volatilization of mercury is advanced in warm weather, or if the element is vacuumed or otherwise disturbed. If inhaled for long periods of time at elevated levels, mercury can adversely affect human health, causing irreversible brain, liver and kidney damage. Mercury can also enter the bloodstream through cuts in the skin. Recycling mercury-containing items is the *only* safe way to dispose of them properly. Improper disposal methods include pouring it down the drain, putting it in the trash, and burning it in or incinerators. For more information, visit IDEM's Web site at: <http://www.in.gov/idem/mercury/index.html>

Contacts for Mercury Free Muncie Day:

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